

Coverdell Progress Report

The report summarizes the activities of the Drug Analysis Laboratory at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health related to the Coverdell Forensic Sciences Improvement Grant for the time period January 1 – June 30, 2010.

During this reporting period, the Drug Analysis Laboratory made considerable progress towards meeting the Coverdell Grant objectives of reducing testing turnaround time, decreasing the sample backlog and providing professional training for forensic analysts. The laboratory tested 2009 cases containing 3416 items and reduced the testing turn a round time by 19 days (81 days to 62 days). Of those cases completed, 145 were analyzed by a chemist funded by the Coverdell Grant. This number is less than seen in previous reporting periods due to the resignation of project chemist Stacy DesJardin on February 25, 2011 and the time required to hire and train a replacement.

Analytical chemist, Hevis Lleshi was hired on March 27, 2011 to continue working on the Coverdell objectives. Ms. Leshi came to the laboratory well prepared with a graduate degree in Biomedical Forensic Science (Chemistry Track) from Boston University School of Medicine and internship experience gained at the Massachusetts State Police, Marine Section in Boston. Upon joining the DPH laboratory, Ms. Lleshi immediately began an extensive internal training program which included laboratory safety, institute policies and procedures, standard operating procedures and laboratory quality assurance practices. Ms. Leshi's competency for testing seized drugs was demonstrated by supervisory observation and review, as well split sample analysis with an experienced forensic analyst. On June 15, 2011, she was officially appointed by Commissioner Auerbach, as an analyst in the Drug Analysis Laboratory and began testing samples submitted by law enforcement.

An important component of the Coverdell Forensic Sciences Grant is to provide technical training and professional development opportunities to forensic analysts. During the reporting period, 3 chemists (Peter Piro, Michael Lawler and Rebecca Pontes) traveled to Reston, Virginia to attend "DEA School", a five day class for forensic chemists on chain of custody, analytical methods, emerging trends in drug abuse and courtroom testimony. Additionally, the laboratory contracted with Restek Corporation to provide a one day intensive in-service on gas chromatography/mass spectrometry. Ten analysts from both the Boston and Amherst laboratories attended the session which included GC/MS theory, troubleshooting and application to the analysis of seized drugs including but not limited to heroin, cocaine, hallucinogens, opiates and pharmaceuticals.